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ABSTRACT

A course in reading and learning techniques was designed for returning students at the Indiana University/Purdue University campus at Fort Wayne, Indiana. The first part of the course concerns study skills such as listening and notetaking, text reading, test taking, time management, and vocabulary development. An individualized segment of the course is based on the results of a diagnostic reading test with emphasis on improving reading comprehension. The third segment of the class involves an introduction to the campus and its offerings. In this segment, deans of the university's five divisions discuss their programs, and presentations are made by counseling personnel, the placement director, and the coordinator of academic support services. Over 80% of the students who have enrolled in this course the first four times it has been offered are now taking further coursework either at this college or at a neighboring college. (MKM)

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# Helping Returning Students Remain

Too often adult students returning to school after several years absence feel uncomfortable among all of the younger students. Much publicity is produced by higher education to lure these adults into post-secondary programs. However, once they arrive on campus, they are confronted with what seems an unfeeling bureaucracy, a plethora of underexplained programs and requirements, and a group of instructors whose methods and demeanors are foreign to their experience. Now that these adults have taken their first step by enrolling and paying their tuition, it seems that few people are interested in their progress.

Operating on the principle that older students first exposure to the university should be a positive one, that these students need both familiarity with the university environment and developmental work on basic college success skills, and that this initial experience should be credit-bearing, a start toward their degree programs, we have redesigned a course from the university's regular offerings to fit the special needs of these returning students. The course is called Reading/Learning Techniques 1, and it carries three under-

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graduate credits. The success of this course has been overwhelming; over eighty per cent of the students who have enrolled in this course the first four times it has been offered are now taking further coursework either here or at other neighboring colleges.

The course meets two days a week for eight weeks; class sessions are three hours in length and are broken into three unequal parts: group study skill activities; individual work on reading or writing problems, and; a brief introduction into some aspect of the university.

Group study skill activities are planned to last for seventy-five minutes of each period. The first skill covered is listening. Students spend about two weeks working through a packaged program on listening difficulties and means to overcome them. The next two weeks are spent on note-taking. The first session begins with an instructor lecture defining a system of two-column notation and explaining various methods for remembering note material. Next, students listen to a series of recorded lectures; they are asked to take notes as they listen. Notes are compared with a set of model notes for each lecture. Finally, students are tested on each lecture to ascertain whether they are able to retain the material from the lectures. During the last half of the course, one week each is spent on text-reading, test-taking, and time-management. During the final week, vocabulary development techniques are discussed for one class period. The final session is reserved for general commentary and for testing.

Student work in the individualized segment of the class period is based on diagnostic testing done during the first class meeting( the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, Form C), and for those who show no reading difficulties, a 450-600 word essay written on an assigned topic. After conferences with the instructor, students experiencing reading problems are assigned to work through locally prepared modular packages on main idea, inference, and/or context vocabulary during the seventy-five minute individualized sessions. Those without reading problems work to further improve their writing skills in modular packages assigned according to writing needs indicated in their themes. When these students complete their writing skill development work, they are certified as ready to take their beginning composition course without the need to take the usual required English placement test.

Grading is mostly dependent on this individualized work. Since all students need to complete the group study skill work successfully, grade differenciation is based on the number of individualized modules completed and on the quality of work within each module. Since most students have had high motivation, they have generally qualified for grades of B or better. This initial success seems to help the students acquire greater confidence in their ability to survive within the university.

The third segment of the class involves an introduction to the campus and its offerings. Prior analysis of reasons for student

failure or withdrawal indicated the lack of concrete, reasonable career objectives as a main cause of student problems. For example, returning women students frequently limit their career choices to education and nursing despite the fact that both professions are overcrowded and that, in the case of nursing, heavy science requirements must be met before they can be admitted into the program.

The first people to talk with the students are the deans of the university's five divisions or their representatives. The deans explain the various programs offered in their areas, emphasizing areas of high demand and easy accessibility for older students. An example of frequently unknown information provided in these sessions involves preparation for careers in business. At Indiana/Purdue, a B.S. in Business requires four years of highly specialized work; a B.S. in Supervision, which may involve a strong concentration in Business, offers an intermediate stopping place at the associate degree level. This option is not available in the Business program. Thus, a Supervision major may lead to more immediate employment possibilities, or it may lead to quicker raises for those already employed. This type of information might not normally be brought to the attention of a student who expressed interest in a Business major.

Each presentation is intentionally brief so that students may ask questions on material presented. Handouts on programs are

distributed. The deans arrange to stay for additional post-class time for discussion with students who desire more detailed information about their areas.

After receiving this basic information about careers and programs, students listen to presentations from counseling personnel, the placement director, and the coordinator of academic support services. A counselor who works primarily with adult students talks with the students about various problems older students encounter when coming to the university and about aid the counseling staff is able to give. She also discusses the various tests that are available to help students in determining career plans. Next, the placement director talks with the group on areas in which jobs are readily available and on employment trends. Although he tells the group of national trends, he emphasizes the local job market because most of the adult students in the course are committed to remaining in the Fort Wayne area. Next, the head of developmental academic services points out the availability of tutoring and other basic academic skill development services, the location of these services, and the procedures for taking advantage of them. He tells them the number of students using these services to show that the need for tutoring is not confined to a small group of inferior students. Finally, he urges the group to take steps to solve any academic problems they encounter as soon as they occur.

Lastly, representatives of the admissions office and of the registrar's office visit the class to discuss admissions procedures and classifications, the academic advising system, registration procedures, access to student records, drop/add and withdrawal procedures, grade point average, pass/fail options and general degree requirements.

By this time, students have been made aware of university offerings, services, and procedures, have had the opportunity to question university officials, and probably most important, have developed a cadre of contact people within the university. They are no longer aliens because they have found familiar faces within the university, people who are willing to work with them on whatever difficulties they encounter. Both presentations and speakers have been rated highly. On a five-point scale, with three signifying helpful, no presentation has scored lower than a 3.2 average in post-course evaluations.

The instructor for this course has been specially chosen because of her concern for and interest in adult students. As one who returned to school after several years' absence to complete a master's degree, she has been able to relate well to student concerns. After the cycle of presentations is completed, she initiates discussions on career objectives and expectations to help students relate to each other, to find peer friends, while at the same time clarifying their educational objectives. Post-course evaluations show that students are highly supportive of her work with them.

Post-program contact with these students has generally been maintained through the RAP(Returning Adult Place) program run by Transitional Studies. RAP is an on-going attempt to bring adult students information on academic matters and on personal development concerns related to success at the university. Monthly meetings (each repeated three times to meet the needs of our commuter students) deal with subjects such as classroom expectations, time-management, test anxiety, advising, assertiveness, jobs, and financial aid. A monthly RAP newsletter gives explanations on topics such as figuring a grade point average, placement testing, and major field requirements.

Whether the returning students who have participated in this special course will eventually complete their programs is unknown. What is possible to indicate is that they have had an initial success in the university, that they rate their first contact with the university highly( no mean accomplishment on a largely impersonal campus with over 9,000 students), and that they are at present still continuing their studies.